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## **Governor Announces Critical Steps to Ensure High School Students Graduate Ready for College and Success**

*Nearly \$1 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to fund design of new, meaningful high school graduation requirements for Rhode Island*

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Rhode Island Gov. Donald L. Carcieri today announced a one-year, \$940,148 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to Brown University's Education Alliance to develop performance assessments to support Rhode Island's new high school graduation requirements. The new requirements, adopted earlier this year by the state Board of Regents, will institute a "graduation by proficiency" requirement to align high school graduation standards with skills essential for future success in college and the workplace.

"A few weeks ago when I held a press conference on adult literacy at Dorcas Place, a student recounted how she was a recent high school graduate but could not read," Carcieri said. That further highlights the fact that we need to do more to ensure that our students graduate with the knowledge they need to succeed in the workplace. This grant will help us institute a more challenging curriculum for students and require a demonstration of proficiency for graduation."

According to a recent study by the Manhattan Institute, 32 percent of Rhode Island students graduate high school ready for college, which reflects the national average. This effort will help ensure that students learn and are assessed on the high-level skills needed to perform well in college and sought by employers.

"We need to think about performance other than simply years in the classroom," said Adeline Becker, executive director of Brown University's Education Alliance. "We want to go beyond one-size-fits-all assessments and create evaluations that are meant to assess performance and determine if a student is ready to graduate."

The Education Alliance and the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will develop and implement these new standards. The organizations will form several high school networks of 12 to 15 schools each to develop multiple approaches to the "graduation by proficiency" requirement. More than 15,000 Rhode Island high school seniors will be reached by the project.

Each high school network will examine a number of possible proficiency measures, such as: a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM), which is a credential in addition to a high school diploma verifying a student has met challenging standards in core curricular areas and mastery of real-world skills; an electronic portfolio of student work; or a senior project aligned with Rhode

Island's Common Core of Learning. These assessments are already in place in schools throughout the state and will provide an experiential base for the work.

"Rhode Island leads the nation in recognizing that effective graduation requirements are about more than the number of years in school," said Ray McNulty, Senior Fellow, Education at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "This effort will help ensure that students are assessed on knowledge and skills relevant to performing well in college and the workplace."

The grant also will fund experts in the development of performance assessments who will join Department of Education staff members to form the state-level leadership team for the project. The leadership team will provide ongoing professional development to cultivate leadership and support the implementation and improvement of proficiency-based assessments for graduation.

By the end of 2004, the Rhode Island Department of Education will announce a new set of uniform proficiency-based graduation requirements for the 12 to 15 high schools in the network. The Education Alliance will assist the Department in developing the Web-based suite of resources, including examples of portfolio assessments and projects. According to Becker, the new high school graduation standards will be incorporated into existing district-level strategic and school improvement planning.

"The Regents' High School Regulations, which grew out of the ideas presented at our two High School Summits, have posed a huge challenge for educators around the state," said James A. DiPrete, Chairman of the R.I. Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. "This grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recognizes the innovative practices already underway in Rhode Island, as we work to improve teaching and learning in our high schools."

Once these new standards are developed, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation partners, including Achieve, the Big Picture Company, Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), will help other states currently engaged in high school reform implement similar proficiency-based standards. The Education Alliance and the Rhode Island Department of Education will evaluate the project and disseminate the results after one year.

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**The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** is building upon the unprecedented opportunities of the 21st century to improve equity in global health and learning. Led by Bill Gates' father, William H. Gates Sr., and Patty Stonesifer, the Seattle-based foundation has an endowment of approximately \$25 billion.

**The Education Alliance** at Brown University for more than 25 years has been committed to effect real change in education. The Alliance is home to many innovative programs like The New England Equity Assistance Center, which works to ensure equal access to educational programs and the Regional LAB.

**The R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education** has been implementing the High School Regulations adopted in January 2003 by the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. These regulations require that all high schools adopt graduation requirements that "include a demonstration of proficiency that involves multiple measures of performance for all students" and is consistent with state standards.

**On the Internet:**

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, [www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org)

Education Alliance, [www.alliance.brown.edu](http://www.alliance.brown.edu)

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, [www.ridoe.net](http://www.ridoe.net)